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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

Israel's Political Groups and the Withdrawal Issue

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
18 March 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Israel's Political Groups and the Withdrawal Issue

Introduction

Although there is a divergence of views in Israel on withdrawal from the occupied territories as part of a peace settlement, the great majority of Israelis at this time appear to favor a policy close to that enunciated by Mrs. Meir in an interview published on 13 March by the Times of London. Such criticism of Mrs. Meir's statements as did occur came from those in Israel who believed that she was willing to give back too much rather than too little.

The present Israeli hard-line position stems from an abiding belief that only Israelis can defend Israel. The Israelis' view of their experience with Arab commitments and international guarantees reinforces this attitude.

Note: This memorandum was produced by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Directorate of Plans.

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Attitudes of Various Groups on Withdrawal

1. Because of the system of proportional representation whereby the parties are awarded seats in the Knesset in proportion to the percentage of votes they obtain, Israeli political parties tend to reflect fairly accurately the entire spectrum of attitudes on paramount national issues. So it is with regard to withdrawal. Positions range from the "hawks" or annexationists to a "fringe" group that would have Israel withdraw from all the land taken in 1967.

2. The most important group among the "hawks" is GAHAL, an alliance of the nonsocialist, liberal Herut and Liberal parties. GAHAL advocates the retention of the territories for historical and religious reasons. GAHAL controls 26 seats in the Knesset, but it may have lost some support as a result of leaving the government in August 1970 to protest the decision to participate in the Jarring talks. The leader of GAHAL, Menahem Begin, has said that to withdraw would be to redivide the historic land of Israel and that to leave the West Bank would lead to the "Saigonization" of Tel Aviv because the city would once again be within range of fedayeen rockets and infiltrators. Both GAHAL and the extreme rightist Free Center Party, which holds two Knesset seats, introduced nonconfidence motions over Mrs. Meir's Times interview.

3. Soon after the 1967 war, a loose group of politicians, public figures, and other persons favoring annexation of the occupied territories formed the "Whole Land of Israel Movement." Not a formal political party and considered extremist even in Israel, this group has favored the establishment of settlements in the territories, especially the West Bank, as part of an effort to make Israeli presence in the territories irreversible. Although the size of its membership is unknown and its concepts have been criticized by Mrs. Meir, it does include a number of prominent Israelis, including Isser Harel, a former chief of the Israeli security apparatus.

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4. The parties that make up the government--controlling 76 of 120 Knesset seats--represent the middle ground of Israeli opinion on the issue--those who favor retention of some, but not all, of the territories. Within the dominant Alignment, the alliance for voting and election purposes between the Israel Labor Party (ILP) and the Mapam Party, differences do exist on the withdrawal issue although the great majority of members of both parties probably agree on the essentials listed in Mrs. Meir's interview as a minimum position. In the 1969 electoral campaign, the ILP avoided mentioning specific territories that Israel hoped to retain except that the draft platform stated Jerusalem would remain united. In a subsequent agreement--the "oral Torah"--however, some general principles were spelled out. Mrs. Meir said that statements on borders in the interview were simply a reaffirmation of that earlier agreement. Defense Minister Moshe Dayan's "strategic security borders" are essentially the same as those cited by Mrs. Meir. In the past, Dayan, adopting a "hawkish" position within the government, has held that Israel cannot wait for the Arabs to negotiate and should "create facts" in the occupied territories.

5. Deputy Prime Minister Vigal Allon has opposed wholesale annexation because he believes--as does Mrs. Meir--that the Arab population west of the Jordan River would ultimately exceed that of the Jews. The Allon Plan rejects annexation of areas with a large Arab population and demands settlement of the thinly populated Jordan Rift--the ridge area traversing the West Bank from north to south--as a security zone.

6. In order to retain flexibility in his role as foreign minister, Abba Eban has in the past resisted spelling out his personal views on the territories. ILP Secretary General Pinhas Sapir, viewed by some as the most likely successor to Mrs. Meir

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as prime minister, has avoided becoming involved in disputes over withdrawal although he opposes incorporating into the state Arabs other than those living in areas whose retention is dictated by security reasons. There is no reason to believe, however, that either Eban or Sapir, both of whom are regarded as the most "dovelike" of the ILP leaders, would or could be any more forthcoming on withdrawal than Mrs. Meir.

7. The Mapam Party constitutes the more liberal element within the Alignment in terms of attitudes toward withdrawal. Although Mapam, which controlled eight seats prior to its alliance with the ILP, published a policy statement soon after the war calling for the return of all occupied territories except Jerusalem, it subsequently modified its stand. Probably only a small number of leftist Mapam members would differ greatly with Mrs. Meir's views of what parts of the territories are essential to Israel's security.

8. Acting within the government to balance Mapam's tendencies is the National Religious Party (NRP), which controls 12 seats in the Knesset. The Alignment's largest coalition partner, the NRP reacted to Mrs. Meir's interview by calling for further clarification, and three of the NRP's Knesset members abstained on the nonconfidence vote in the Knesset on 16 March. The NRP's religious and Zionist orientations give it a strong and genuine attachment to the West Bank where Jewish religious and historical sites are more numerous than in Israel proper. The party has been torn by a leadership struggle and the younger pro-annexationist minority within the party will push for a strong stand on the West Bank issue.

9. Real doves on the territorial issue do not constitute a significant element on the Israeli political scene. One of Israel's two Communist parties (MAKI), which has one vote in the Knesset, favors returning the occupied territories in the event of peace. The other Communist Party, the primarily Arab RAKAH, which has three seats in the Knesset, has followed Moscow's line and calls for immediate withdrawal. Other elements favoring withdrawal include Uri Avenri's Haolem Hazeh Party, which has

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two votes in the Knesset and has advocated the formation of a binational Palestine state.

The Government Enjoys Broad Public Support for its Position

10. The unified stand in the cabinet against total withdrawal to the pre-June 1967 borders reflects a broad public consensus. The US Embassy in Tel Aviv believes that the government currently enjoys considerable domestic support for its position, possibly upwards of 90 percent. Where opinions differ, according to the embassy, is on the specific location of borders and on whether now is the time to start drawing them. The embassy does believe that there has been some reassessment of attitudes among the Israeli public and government officials and that Israelis are now more open-minded about the possibility and perhaps the price of peace than they were a year ago. Even so, there is deep-seated and vocal suspicion and skepticism that the Arabs have given or will give up the objective of dismantling the Zionist state, and there is no indication that any softening of public attitudes toward the Arabs extends to the point of willingness to compromise on matters most Israelis believe are essential to the physical security of the state and of their dwelling places.

Conclusion

11. It is doubtful that the present government could agree to withdraw from any of the areas listed as essential by Mrs. Meir and survive. Mrs. Meir's statements to the Times not only raised a storm of protest from the right, but also drew criticism from the more moderate National Religious Party (NRP) and even from some members of Mrs. Meir's own party. The withdrawal of the NRP from the government would leave the Alignment with a majority of four seats, an edge so slight that many political observers have pronounced it unworkable.

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12. In the event that the present government should fall, there does not appear to be any combination of parties that might adopt a more forthcoming attitude on withdrawal and that could command a majority in the present Knesset. In addition, there is no sign of any shift in opinion that would change the balance of political power in Israel--and as a result the positions on withdrawal--should a new election become necessary before the scheduled 1973 date.

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STRENGTH OF THE ISRAELI POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE KNESSET

Alignment	56
GAHAL	26
National Religious	12
Alignment Minorities	4
Agudat Yisrael	4
Independent Liberals	4
State List	4
RAKAH	3
Poalei Agudat Yisrael	2
Free Center	2
Haolem Hazeh	2
MAKI	1
 TOTAL	 120

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